DRAINAGE AROUND YOUR HOME

Are you considering purchasing a new home? If so, there are several drainage conditions you should evaluate before making that purchase. Purchasing a home is one of the most important decisions you can make, but unfortunately it can turn into a nightmare if the property suffers from drainage problems. Before making that purchase, consider the following:

1. Location in Neighborhood: Is this lot the lowest in the neighborhood? If so, remember that water will run to it. When that happens, does the water have an adequate way out?

2. Know How the Lot Drains: It is important to understand how the lot will drain. Does all of the drainage go to the street? Does it drain to the rear of the lot? Does it drain to both? Every new subdivision has a Master Drainage Plan filed with the Sedgwick County Register of Deeds office. Ask your realtor to get you a copy and study it. You can also get a copy from the Register of Deeds office.

3. Evaluate Drainage Outlets: Once you understand how the lot is to drain, evaluate the drainage outlets. Outlets must remain unobstructed to work properly. Often, neighbors may unknowingly obstruct the drainage outlet by constructing board fences, earth fills, pools, sheds, or landscaping. Could this happen? Are methods in place to prevent it? This is particularly critical for drainage from backyards. Also, flat yards tend to hold water. Ideally, any outlet should have fall of at least 1.5 to 2.0 feet per 100 feet.

4. Slope Away From House: Be sure the ground around the home slopes away from the foundation for at least 20 feet or so. If this area is too flat or slopes towards the house, water may pond next to the foundation and cause foundation problems. Also, avoid excessively flat backyards as they tend to keep water from draining away quickly enough and may actually hold water for long periods of time.

5. Where do Downspouts Drain? They must discharge to areas that drain away from the house. Draining to grass areas is preferred over concrete areas to give the water the opportunity to infiltrate as opposed to running off. Splash pans should be used to prevent excessive erosion.

6. Where Does the Sump Pump Drain? As with downspouts, it should discharge at ground level into an area that drains away from the house. Do not allow it to freely discharge on a neighbor's property or onto a city street. If possible, consider attaching a hose to the discharge point and using it to water shrubs, trees, and the like. Use this water as a resource.

7. Where Does the Neighbor's Sump Pump Drain? Look to see if they freely drain onto the property you might buy. This often causes problems with standing water or erosion.

8. FEMA Designated Flood Hazard Areas: Contact the City's Storm Water Management Office to determine if the property is in a flood hazard area. If it is, you will be required by your lending institution to purchase and maintain flood insurance on the property. Be careful to assess the risk that you are willing to take to live on this property. Learn what being or not being in a FEMA flood hazard area really means. Do not assume that the property won't flood if it is outside of a flood hazard area.

9. Elevation of the Home: Always try to purchase a home that you enter into by stepping up into from the ground level. One or two steps provides protection from localized flooding due to poor lot drainage. Look at the basement windows. If they sit at ground level and the yard is flat, problems could develop during heavy rains. Build up around these basement windows with window wells to provide additional protection. Homes with thresholds and windows at ground level should be avoided if possible. Driveways should slope away from the garage, not towards it.

10. Sump Pump System: If you are looking at a home with a basement, be sure it has a sump pump in the basement. The system should have a battery back-up or water pressure backup so it will operate when the power is out. This is especially critical if the home has a walkout basement pit that relies on the sump pump system for drainage.

11. Adjacent Lake Elevation: If a lake or pond is located within several lots of the house, determine whether or not the lake will backup onto your lot during periods of heavy rain. This can be determined by comparing your lot elevations with the 100 year lake elevation as shown on the subdivision drainage plan. If backup occurs, assess your risk accordingly.

12. Basement Floor Drains: These should always have backup valves on them to prevent sewage backup.

13. Roadside Ditches: If drainage away from the lot is through ditches next to the street, inspect the ditches for at least one block each way to determine if they are obstructed or driveway pipes are plugged. If those conditions exist, determine what can be done to correct the problem.

14. Talk to Neighbors: Before you buy, talk to your potential neighbors to see what neighborhood drainage problems might exist. Their experiences are an invaluable source of information.

If you will look at these factors as a part of your decision, we think you will avoid many of the drainage problems that plague many residents. But remember, drainage is but one thing to consider in making your decision. Only you can decide which factors are the most important in making your decision.

Good Luck!